

Message Text

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EG, US

SUBJECT: QUERY FROM FAHMY

1. ALTHOUGH MY SCHEDULED MEETING WITH FAHMY HAS AGAIN POSTPONED UNTIL TOMORROW, HE TELEPHONED ME EARLY THIS AFTERNOON TO ASK IF I HAD ANY INFORMATION ABOUT AN "ISRAELI AGGRESSION" AGAINST LEBANON. HE HAD APPARENTLY JUST BEEN LISTENING TO RADIO DAMASCUS, WHICH HE CALIMS IS PLAYING MARTIAL MUSIC AND LCAIMING SOME ISRAELI AGGRESSION HAS TAKEN PLACE. ACCORDING TO FAHMY, NO DETAILS WERE GIVEN. I TOLD HIM I HAD NO SUCH INFORMATION. IN FACT, WE HAD URGED THE SYRIANS, AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, AND THE ISRAELIS TO KEEP THEIR COOL AND AVOID SITUATIONS WHERE A CONFRONTATION IS INEVITABLE.

2. FAHMY WAS WORRIED. HE EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE SYRIANS MAY BE DELIBERATELY ESCALATING A BORDER INCIDENT TO FOCUS ARAB ATTENTION ON DAMASCUS AND TO FRIGHTEN LEBANON. THE SYRIANS, HE BELIEVES, MAY TRY TO CONTENTEND THAT ANY ISRAELI ATTACK IS A RESULT OF SADAT'S ABROGATION OF THE EGYPTIAN-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP TREATY. THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD, NO ONE WILL BELIEVE THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD DARE TO ATTACK LEBANON WITHOUT USG APPROVAL AND THAT THIS IN TURN WAS MADE POSSIBLE ONLY BECUASE OF SADAT'S ACTION IN SIGNING SINAI II.

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3. GIVING VENT TO HIS DEEP-SEATED SUSPICIONS OF THE SYRIANS, HE OBSERVED THAT ASAD IS IN A "FIX" BECAUSE OF HIS "SERIOUS SETBACK" IN LEBANON. FOR THIS REASON, ASAD IS CONCERNED THAT THE SYRIANS MAY BE SEIZING UPON "GENUINE OR FABRICATED" TENSIONS IN LEBANON TO DIRECT ATTENTION FROM THEIR SETBACK. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE NOTED A SERIOUS DISPUTE IS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY BETWEEN FATAH AND ZUHAYR MUHSIN'S SAIQA, ACTING FOR THE SYRIANS, ABOUT EVENTS IN LEBANON. MOREOVER, LT AHMAD KHATIB HAS REFUSED TO COOPERATE WITH THE SYRIANS, BUT IS WORKING WITH GENERAL AHDAB. ASAD, ACCORDING TO FAHMY, IS EXTREMELY DISTURBED ABOUT THIS AND SYRIAN TROOPS WERE SENT TO PROTECT AND SUPPORT FRANGIA.

4. I REEMPHASIZED TO FAHMY THAT WE HAVE URGED RESTRAINT ON ALL THE PARTIES AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT GOE IS DOING THE SAME. IN OUR VIEW, NOTWITHSTANDING EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN DIFFERENCES, SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON HAS BEEN GENERALLY CONTRUCTIVE.

5. FAHMY ASKED THAT I SEND AN URGENT MESSAGE TO YOU ASKING FOR ANY INFORMATION WE MIGHT HAVE ABOUT AN ALLEGED ISRAELI "AGGRESSION." HE ALSO ASKED THAT WE AGAIN URGE THE ISRAELIS TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT AND NOT TO BE PROVOKED INTO MILITARY ACTION. HE IS FEARFUL THAT THE ISRAELIS MAY BE TEMPTED TO DO SO AS A MEANS OF CONFRONTING SADAT WITH A SERIOUS PROBLEM AND FORCING HIM TO REACT IN SOME MANNER WHICH WILL UNDERCUT WHATEVER KUDOS THE PRESIDENT HAS GAINED IN THE US FOR HIS ABROGATION OF EGYPTIAN-SOVIET TREATY.
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